How do I recognise it?

The Brolga is a large, stately, long-legged bird. Standing 1.4m tall, it is one of Australia’s largest flying birds with a wing-span of up to 2.5m. Unmistakable because of its size and silver-grey plumage it has a band of bare red skin which extends from the beak around the head. The crown of the head is grey, as is the ear. It legs are dark grey to black.

Where does it live?

The Brolga is a wetland bird; preferring open swamps, shallow lakes and lagoons, adjacent grasslands and cultivated/cropped areas. The Brolga nests on large platforms in shallow water (less than 30cm deep) protected by wetland vegetation such as Canegrass, Lignum and sedges. Typically Brolgas pair for life and return to the same nesting site year after year.

What does it eat?

Brolgas feed on seeds, tubers, and roots, large insects and their larvae, molluscs, crustaceans, spiders, frogs, lizards, small rodents, grain (wheat, rice) and rarely fish. Brolgas will forage on both wet and dry ground and often dig for food items.

Why is it threatened?

Once widespread and abundant across the wetlands of northern and south-eastern Australia, the Brolga has suffered a severe contraction of its range. While still common across northern Australia (northern population estimated at greater than 20,000) it has disappeared from coastal regions in central/southern NSW and eastern Vic, and is now rare across most of its previous south-eastern range (southern population estimated at approximately 1,000).

It is estimated that 50% of wetlands within NSW has been lost or degraded since European settlement. The decline in Brolga numbers has been directly attributed to this loss and degradation which
is the result of; river regulation, water diversion, pollution, siltation, salinisation, land clearing and overgrazing. Brolgas have also been adversely impacted by stock trampling nests, chemical use near wetlands (herbicides, pesticides) and predation by introduced species (foxes, pigs, dogs and cats).

Why is our catchment important?
The Border Rivers Gwydir Catchment supports a wide variety of wetland areas (wet grassland, swamps, billabongs, lagoons and lakes) essential for this species, including the internationally Ramsar listed Gwydir Wetlands, and nationally listed; Mother of Ducks Lagoon and Dangar’s Lagoon on the tablelands and Morella Watercourse/Boobera Lagoon/Punbougal Lagoon near Boggabilla.

What can I do?
- Retain and improve wetland areas.
- Maintain and/or reinstate natural water flows into and out of wetland areas.
- Control grazing in and around wetlands, and wherever possible provide alternative stock watering points.
- Protect wetlands from pollution.
- Avoid using herbicides, pesticides and other chemicals near wetland areas.
- Encourage regeneration of trees and shrubs in and around wetland areas.
- Connect isolated wetland areas to other habitat patches by planting corridors of local native plant species.
- Control foxes, pigs, feral dogs and cats in wetland areas.
- Desex domestic dogs and cats and keep indoors at night.
- Protect known nesting sites from disturbance including removing stock during breeding.
- Regulate burning activities to retain wetland vegetation (reed beds, Lignum).
- Report all sightings of Brolgas to the Department of Environment and Climate Change.

But wait there’s more...
By protecting and improving habitat for the Brolga, you are also protecting and improving habitat for a whole suite of other threatened and declining plants and animals dependent upon wetlands and wetland vegetation including: Freckled Duck, Blue-billed Duck, Latham’s Snipe, Black-necked Stork, Green and Golden Bell Frog and Painted Snipe.

References
Ayers D, Nash S and Baggett K (1996) Threatened Species of Western New South Wales. NSW NPWS, Hurstville, NSW.